



For Immediate Release  
March 4, 2021

Contact: Robyn Bland  
215.780.1487

### **Black Student Leaders Create Space for Conversation at Salus University**



*Salus University inaugural Black Student Union (BSU) members **Tavii El**, '21OT, of Philadelphia, and **Johana Fortune**, '21OT, of North Baldwin, New York.*

**Elkins Park, Pa.** — Salus University student **Tavii El**, '21OT, of Philadelphia, an Occupational Therapy (OT) student working toward a master's degree, is slated to graduate this year. But

not before leaving her legacy as president of the University's inaugural Black Student Union (BSU).

"We wanted all the minorities to connect, particularly Black people and other people of color," El said. "And, we wanted to have a platform where we could discuss issues and current events in a safe space."

In addition to El serving as president of the University's BSU, fellow officers include **Brandon Garces, '23OD**, of Bay Shore, New York, as vice president; **Johana Fortune, '21OT**, of North Baldwin, New York, as secretary; and **Camille Menns, '21OT**, of New Brunswick, New Jersey, as treasurer. The group has 15 to 20 active general members.

The newly established group meets virtually every other Thursday. Discussions prioritize topics centered around Black mental health, interprofessional healthcare collaboration and raising awareness about all healthcare professions among youth in surrounding communities. While planning events during a pandemic presents challenges, the BSU members still want to forge ahead, starting the conversations within the Salus community and eventually the community at large through outreach and community service events that provide insight, guidance and education.

**Juliana M. Mosley-Williams, PhD, CDP, special assistant to the president for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)** at Salus, said BSUs are more than platforms to uplift voices of Black Americans, emphasizing their impact on higher education throughout history.

"Since the first BSU was formed in 1966 at San Francisco State University, the history of unions and associations for Black students has been bookended with racial injustices and inequalities. During the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, young Black student leaders sought to unite with an overwhelming need for kinsmanship and familiarity, given the origins of BSUs at predominantly white institutions," Dr. Mosley-Williams said. "Even at a professional healthcare institution like Salus University, Black students who are preparing to become doctors, healthcare providers and clinicians were compelled to establish a BSU to have a collective voice, dispel negative stereotypes and address cultural misunderstandings through unification, educational and social programming that benefits the entire University community."

Pandemic or not, Salus **President Michael Mittelman, OD '80, MPH, MBA, FAAO, FACHE**, also said there's an urgent need for a group specifically dedicated to supporting Black and diverse student populations at Salus.

"Since their inception, BSUs nationwide have provided a forum for the cultural, social and political discussions that have helped to educate and provide fact-based information to support Black students and allies," Dr. Mittelman said. "Our BSU at Salus has built upon that same heritage."

Through their Salus community outreach, the members have been providing thought provoking forums that have embraced many sensitive, yet important topics, helping the collective community learn how to support the larger movement and command an equitable society for everyone.

El and the rest of the BSU members at Salus hope to provide insight into cultural issues and serve as a bridge to better understand each other. According to her, the goal of the University's BSU, which is open to all students regardless of their skin color, is to have more togetherness on campus where people can learn, ask questions and have discussions.

"I'm hoping we have a voice so if something is going on, people know the issue is going to be talked about appropriately and that it's coming from people who understand," El said. "Hopefully, the Salus BSU can help people dig beyond the surface and dive deeper into issues."

### **About Salus University**

Salus University, founded as the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 1919, today is a diversified, globally recognized professional academic center of learning that offers a wide range of degree programs in the professions of Optometry, Audiology, Physician Assistant, Blindness and Low Vision Studies, Biomedicine, Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology. Salus operates four clinical facilities in Philadelphia and Montgomery counties that provide highly specialized vision, hearing and balance, and speech-language pathology services. The University has more than 1,200 students, and more than 14,000 alumni worldwide. For more information, please visit [www.salus.edu](http://www.salus.edu).